



My effort to unlock America's oil

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Recently I introduced the Facilitating American Security Through Energy Resources Act (FASTER). I did this in light of the recent announcement by the Obama Administration to tap the Strategic Petroleum Reserve for 30 million barrels in an attempt to temporarily alleviate rising energy prices, particularly high gasoline prices. The United States started the petroleum reserve in 1975 after oil supplies were cut off during the 1973-1974 oil embargo to provide a buffer against a "significant" supply disruption. The president claims this is necessary due to the disruption in supply from the fighting in Libya and unrest in other parts of the Middle East and not for the political purpose of tamping down rising gas prices during the summer driving season.

I was surprised, but gratified that the president acknowledged that an increase in the supply of oil, relative to demand, lowers the prices consumers ultimately pay at the pump. Unfortunately, he continues to ignore that we are sitting on extraordinary domestic reserves of oil and natural gas on our public lands that could be responsibly developed.

My legislation will require the U.S. Department of the Interior to accelerate and streamline the approval process for onshore oil and natural gas production permits on federal lands to produce more domestic oil, instead of depleting our strategic reserves and standing in the way of allowing Americans to develop our own energy resources. It will require Department of the Interior officials to identify 200 onshore leases every year that have the highest energy potential and expeditiously move them through the permitting process within 180 days. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) claims it takes, on average, 206 days to process a drilling permit application, but the actual waiting time for many permits is closer to two years.

Officials in the Obama Administration may deny that they have restricted access to energy resources on federal lands out West but that just isn't true. We are sitting on enough of our own energy resources that we could lower energy costs, stimulate the economy and promote energy independence for the United States if only the Obama Administration allowed us to produce them.

The Obama Administration claims energy production is up, but this is due to efforts taken before they took office that are only now coming to fruition. The actions they are responsible for are far less helpful to our economy. According to the Public Lands Statistics report issued by the BLM in January, in 2008 more than 2,400 new oil and natural gas leases issued and 2.6 million acres leased for production, but in 2010 the number of newly issued leases dropped to about 1,300 and the amount of leased land fell to 1.3 million acres.

A report released by the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service on March 25 shows that the United States has the largest combined oil, natural gas and coal energy reserves in the world. Our country's abundant oil and natural gas resources represent not just trillions of dollars in revenue, but also the high-paying jobs that go with it.

The FASTER Act is a commonsense bill that will enable Interior officials to identify the high-potential leases that are being held up and take the necessary steps to ensure production is allowed to proceed in a timely manner.

It's time for the Obama Administration to let our country develop its own resources so we are not dependent on other countries.